

Innovative Citizen Involvement for Creating Public Value in Local Government

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Abstract

The central tension in local government in Australia and elsewhere is often characterized as between that of its democratic and service delivery roles. The democratic role of local government is to reflect, through elected officials, the values and aspirations of citizens. To maintain their electoral mandate, elected officials seek to be as responsive as possible to citizen values and aspirations. This role emphasizes the importance of elected officials as actors in the system of representative government. Local government's service delivery role places a different set of demands. Here the focus is on efficiency and effectiveness, a rather narrowly defined private sector view of ensuring that citizens get the best value for money for the services that they receive. The tension between these two roles can be contrasted as one pulling in the direction of being able to do as much as possible for citizens, whilst the other emphasizes doing as little as possible as fast as possible. This tension is not easily resolvable if characterized in this way. This paper draws on public value as a framework for characterizing the role of the public sector and, in particular local government. It posits that the values and aspirations of citizens are not just to be 'received' and 'responded to' by elected representatives as in the traditional model of representative government, but should be engaged with, shaped and informed through enabling participation of citizens in decisions which affect them. This approach changes the roles of local authorities and citizens and strengthens, rather than diminishes, representative government. Through innovative citizen participation both citizens and elected representatives are engaged in a discourse that continually shapes and reshapes the others values and actions.

Key words: Citizen Involvement, Public Value, Local Government

Perceptions of the roles of local government

The focus on New Public Management (NPM) over the last 30 years has introduced private sector management practices into public administration. NPM sought to address the perceived weaknesses of the bureaucratic model, broadly characterized as: lack of responsiveness; management which is process bound rather than outcome focused; elevated commitment of public servants to their portfolios thus leading to tension between expertise, ambitions, and political imperatives. Central to these criticisms was the lack of agreed standards for judging success and inadequate ways of describing the benefits of public provision beyond the very blunt judgment of success reflected through the electoral cycle.

The NPM paradigm instituted to respond to these concerns included 'general' (non-policy expert) management, rather than specialist management, performance

management that focuses on the more easily measured criteria of efficiency and effectiveness and an explicit focus on cost controls as indicators of these criteria (Hood, 1991:4-5).

Related to this is the increasing dissatisfaction of citizens with government (Norris, 2011). Among other things this has led to a range of disparate citizen movements (for example WikiLeaks, the Occupy Movement and resident action groups amongst others), rising apathy and expressed distrust, and overall an increase in the expectation that government will deliver more with less. For example, current political debates in Australia are dominated by the achievement of public sector budget surpluses; yet, there is no attendant debate about the necessity to either increase the taxation base or reduce service delivery to achieve this, so we are stuck in a discourse about increasing efficiency, particularly by cuts to the public sector. No government appears to have the courage to begin this conversation with citizens (Glaser, Yeager & Parker 2006), perhaps surprisingly with the exception of some progressive local authorities.

Public value is a move away from the primary focus on efficiency and effectiveness toward the expectation that governments should create public value through their actions. Public value is “A framework that helps us connect what we believe is valuable . . . and requires public resources, with improved ways of understanding what our 'publics' value and how we connect to them” (Moore 1995).

Politically mediated preferences are not merely expressed *but created through processes* that generate trust and fairness (O'Flynn 2005b in O'Flynn 2007). It requires dialogue between citizens and representative governments to collectively shape the mechanisms that can be deployed to respond to citizen aspirations. These processes can create shared agreement about what public value means, while educating citizens about what is possible at the same time as changing the way that local authorities relate to and understand their constituents.

Collaboration to create public value

From this perspective, there is a role for collaboration between citizens and representative government to identify citizen aspirations. Government actions must be viewed as creating substantive value through the realization of these aspirations and citizens have an entirely legitimate role in defining and determining that value.

Smith (2004, p.70) argues that public managers are presented with a profound challenge as they “. . . have to make a case for the *value they claim to create*” (*emphasis added in original*). This requires a significant redefinition of the role of governments as they move beyond the constrained roles adopted in Traditional Public Management (TPM) (Stoker, 2006). Further, this requires governments to engage with communities beyond more traditional forms of consultation, largely discredited as the 'Decide, Announce, Defend' model (Innes and Booher, 2010). This requires a move from the left to the right of the continuum (Figure 1 below) in order to meaningfully involve citizens in the definition and creation of public value.

Figure 1 Continuum of community participation



Local Government

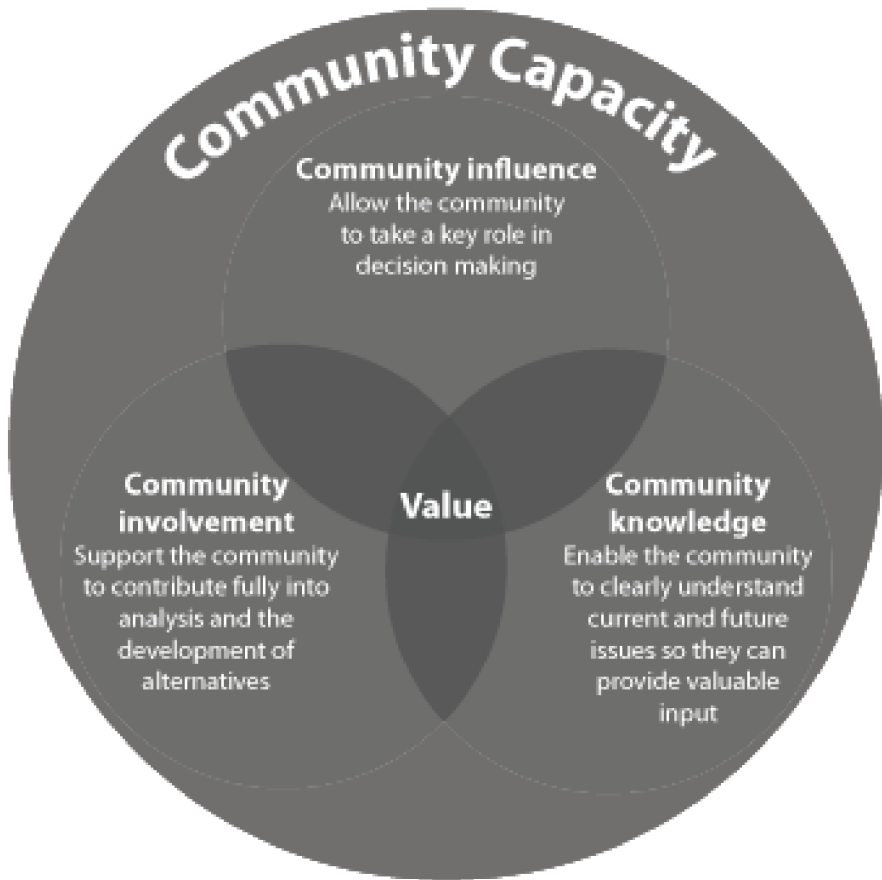
As the level of government closest to citizens, local government is required to be explicit and transparent in terms of what they can and cannot, and will and will not do in response to community aspirations. While at the same time local government is faced with the same challenges as other levels of government in terms of increasing demands and declining revenues.

Operational capability is a necessary precondition for the creation of public value (Moore & Khagram, 2004). Whilst contextual factors, such as increased demands and declining revenues may limit operational capability to realize community aspirations, they need not make creation of public value unattainable. Shared decision-making regarding those limiting contextual factors can lead to the creation of public value.

Local government must pay particular attention to, and invest meaningfully in, understanding and negotiating public value through engagement with citizens. Whilst some public values are inherently developed and expressed through electoral processes of representative democracy, non-political values can only be discovered by developing citizen capacity to explore public dimensions of these values through interaction and autonomous judgment (Bozeman, 2002 p.12). It is through this process of exploration that legitimacy and support, one of the necessary preconditions for public value creation (Moore & Khagram, 2004), can be realized.

Democracy expressed here through participatory public participation....” has an intrinsic (as well as an instrumental) value. Although some values of democracy are means to non-political values, others grow out of democratic processes themselves. Participation completes individuals, in part by enabling them to discover and develop their *public dimensions* [emphasis in original], in part by providing the kinds of interactions that develop capacities for autonomous judgments” (Bozeman, 2002 p.12).

Figure 2: Creating public value through engagement and participation



Robert Reich's (1990, p.41) observation is that the policy-maker is in a "deliberative relationship" that "rather than making 'decisions' and then 'implementing' them, your [local government] role is to manage an ongoing process of public deliberation and education" (in Roberts, 1995 p.40-41). It is through such processes that the foundations for public value creation can be established, tested, refined and embedded. Establishing legitimacy and support for citizen aspirations through deliberative and educative processes can assist local government immeasurably in the realization of public value.

Table 1: Examples of the value of community participation

Who	Benefit
Value to communities	<p>Increased access to information</p> <p>Better understanding of how to provide input into a plan or policy</p> <p>Increased sense of ownership in decision-making and change</p> <p>Capacity and knowledge building within the community</p> <p>Outcomes and investments reflect the aspirations of the community</p>
Value to providers/service agencies	<p>Better ideas and solutions to issues are generated from discussions</p> <p>Conflict and delays or implementation errors are minimised by early participation</p> <p>Reputation and relationships are developed</p> <p>Priorities can be tested in the market</p>
Value to local governments	<p>Increased levels of trust and credibility with agencies and citizens</p> <p>Access to local knowledge, ideas and expertise</p> <p>Better shared understanding of the strategic drivers for effective planning and implementation</p> <p>More citizen support for decisions</p> <p>Networks and partnerships developed</p>

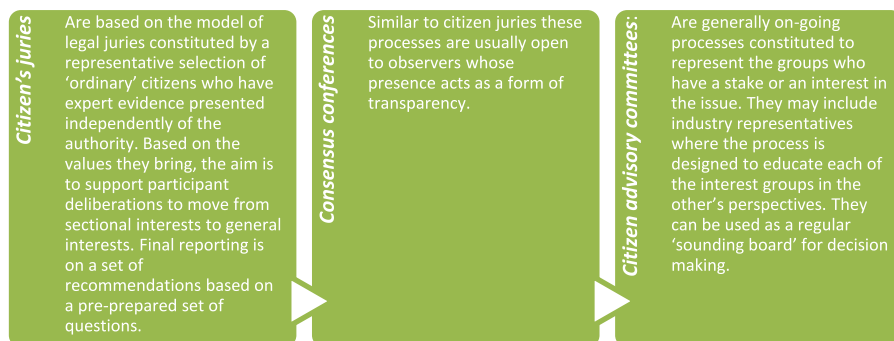
Adapted from:

http://www.communitybuilders.nsw.gov.au/community_engagement_handbook_part_1.pdf

Examples of citizen participation

There are a range of methods that have attempted to enable deliberation and on-going education.

Figure 2: Techniques of citizen participation



The common features of these techniques include:

- **Representativeness:** The specific inclusion of non-traditional participants
A process of selection occurs where key attributes of participants are identified against values, demographics, personality traits, and or articulated interest or stakeholder positions relevant to the issues under consideration, for example pro/anti-environment, supportive/opposed to state intervention, a range of views. These differences in perspectives are the key to the process of enabling participants to understand perspectives other than their own. Random selection, which leads to the exchange of a diversity of views and values is critical to the process of transformation.
To ensure that non-traditional participants are enabled to participate some will require specific outreach and tailored supports, for example, language translation, provision of careers for people with a disability, pre briefings for those who are less educated or literate, etc. This support will enable people of all backgrounds to engage in the process from a similar starting point.

Independence: The design and structure of the process, the facilitation and the selection of participants and the evidence to be tested is provided independently of the authority. As these processes require high levels of engagement with participations, balanced presentation of the expert information and support (without any agenda or preference for the outcomes from the process) the independent design and facilitation of the process is critical to their authenticity. The facilitator's role is to enable process, and it is critical that they have no vested interest or preferred outcome.

- **Transparency:** All the steps in the process should be open to review by any interested parties. If there are to be no observers, it is important that the process be recorded/videoed and captured through detailed reporting. To enable confidence in the conclusions drawn by participants it is important that anyone who has an interest can review all the processes.
- **Reciprocity:** As these processes require considerable commitment of time and energy by participants, who will not gain anything directly from the outcomes of the process, strategies can be designed to enable them to get something from the process. This might include payment, specific skill development or training, opportunities for further engagement if desired, or other kinds of support.
- **Expert inputs:** These include education about the process itself, the relevant technical information to ensure their deliberations are informed, as well as the provision of the range of views that are known about those with an interest or a stake in the outcome. They will come to understand the significance of their views, while appreciating the usually conflicting interest positions that exist around a particular topic.
- **Breadth and depth:** Testing views with those of the general community; no small group of participants can be representative of the wider community, no matter how carefully selected, therefore, it is important for these processes to be supported by information provided on the views of the wider or general community. Typically these will be the results of statistically representative

surveys of the general community which have tested the issues under consideration at a more superficial or higher level. These survey results can be provided as part of the evidence for deliberation.

- **Early involvement:** The way that issues are defined and shaped can in themselves lack independence and transparency. The participants must have the opportunity to test the questions, the scoping of the issues and the focus of engagement.
- **Capacity to influence:** Outlining in advance (during the recruitment phase) how the outcomes of the process will be used by the decision making authority is crucial. If the findings are only advisory that must be clear. If there is a commitment from the elected representatives to adopt the recommendations that too must be clear. The facilitator must be able to guarantee and deliver on these agreements.
- **Engaging with decisions and trade-offs:** The extent of the opportunity that these processes offer are limited if the outcomes of the deliberations are kept to a high level of generality, where the implications and impacts of particular decisions or recommendations are not made clear. Moving into the detail where resource allocations are made, or where the implications for the winners and losers are understood, tests the groups' capacity for consensus and making recommendations based on general or community interest outcomes.
- **Strengthened institutional governance:** Again for the value of these techniques to be fully realized the implications for the local authority must be clear. The confidence that the elected representatives have in these processes must enable them to value the views of properly constituted representative groups who have had quality information which enables them to make well informed and considered recommendations based on the full spectrum of community values, in the general or common interest. This provides a level of reassurance to those responsible for representative government that their decision has been informed by or shared with others.

While these techniques, when effectively delivered, provide opportunities and challenges for elected representatives, they may not impact on the nature of local democracy in an on-going way. Community governance seeks to address this in a structural sense by adopting the key features of these techniques, while embedding them in the on-going operations and decision making of local governments.

Community governance

When local authorities use the term *governance* they usually mean corporate governance, that is, administrative and operational structures that define their organization's decision-making behaviors. In this context 'good' governance is about a certain standard of behavior which leads to accountable, transparent decision-making.

Community governance is about the *process* of how communities participate and the structures local authorities establish, to make decisions with the community, other governments and agencies. It requires local authorities to work with other governments, agencies and citizens to determine preferred futures. Governance, in this sense means working outside their own structures or areas of direct responsibility

to facilitate and enable strategic priorities and desired outcomes. It involves facilitating shared decisions and joint actions to achieve agreed outcomes, often with the focus on resource allocation and participation in trade-offs (McKinley, et.al. 2011). It usually involves setting up structures for communities to be engaged in shared decision making processes.

How community governance is different from public participation

For many local authorities, community governance may not look markedly different from what they have done in the past. However, there is an important difference. Traditionally, public participation has focused on elected representatives responding to citizen needs and how they might best be met. Ideally in community governance the needs and aspirations of citizens are not just to be 'received' and 'responded to' by elected representatives. A community governance approach involves *shifting to a different level*: it is oriented more towards a shared process of planning across the whole community to identify preferred outcomes that create public value.

Community governance ideally involves multiple forms of collaboration and engagement ranging from formal partnerships and contractual arrangements, to formal participatory mechanisms such as public forums and citizen committees, to the support of informal networks and activities.

Critically the process of community governance drives a process of collaborative decision-making and, where possible, delegates decisions to those most directly affected by them.

Community governance is helpful to local authorities because, if supported politically and by citizens it:

- Strengthens the democratic responsiveness of decision-making structures
- Improves relationships with communities and citizens, building trust and mutual respect
- Creates more positive attitudes towards the current challenges of declining resources and increasing expectations
- Leads to more active and resilient citizens and communities better able to understand how to meet their own needs
- Enables local authorities to be confident that representative views are being heard and to avoid being captured by sectional interests
- Provides a basis for on-going capacity building of citizens, communities, partner agencies and local governments
- Allows structures and processes to be designed which respond to the specific needs and issues of each locality
- Creates new thinking and internal change processes which reshapes the views and roles of local authorities to informing and educating.

In addition, community governance can create:

- Significantly more engaged citizens who feel they have a role to play in determining their future while at the same time increasing their democratic capacities
- Educates citizens about the inevitable trade-offs required in decision making

- More involved citizens, who becoming increasingly realistic in their expectations of what local authorities can deliver

More representative decisions improving the acceptance and implementation of change

- A shift from traditional forms of representative democracy to institutionally blending in participatory democracy
- Shared knowledge and improved understanding across traditionally antagonistic interest groups
- Future focused partnerships for the long term.

What community governance looks like

Community governance is a broad concept that encompasses a wide range of arrangements through which diverse communities and groups can come together to consider, discuss, decide and seek to affect change that alters outcomes in line with community aspirations. Community governance is not a one-off event but the creation of ongoing and context responsive structures and processes for participation and decision-making. It relies on relationships with citizens that are clearly defined in the decision-making context.

Examples of community governance

Community led planning

In the UK over the past 30 years, two groups, Action with Rural Communities in England and Action for Market Towns, have been involved with promoting community led planning. Community Led Planning is a step-by-step process, that enables every citizen to participate in, and contribute to, improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of their local area. It relies on people coming together locally, researching local needs and priorities and agreeing a range of different actions which help to improve their neighborhood.

Approximately 4,000 communities across England have already been involved in developing Community Led Plans since the late 1970s. These have allowed communities to take responsibility for making things happen locally, rather than waiting on others to do it for them. Their success has relied on volunteers who work closely with parish and town councils and are the driving force behind the work that takes place (Eardley and Vincent, 2001).

Quality community led plans:

- Are owned and led by the community
- Involve everyone locally
- Use extensive deliberative decision making
- Incorporate evidence based actions
- Consider broad social, economic and environment aspects of their community
- Work with local authorities to understand the 'bigger picture'.

Example - Process: Lake District National Park Authority

The local authority worked with four separate groups of parishes to produce a Community Action Plan for each 'cluster'. After each consultation an action planning session was held with officers from local authorities and other organizations as well as residents and councilors from each of the parishes. Officers sat at tables representing their area of knowledge i.e. transport, economic development, housing etc. With the consultation results, groups of residents visited each table in turn, discussed the results and suggested possible actions to tackle problems. Since the officers were available for discussion, any potential unachievable actions were unlikely to be included.

At the end of the sessions the attendees voted for their preferred actions and prioritized them. A plan was drafted and actions prioritized with agreement between officers and members of the community all within a day (Eardley and Vincent, 2001).

Example – Community plans: Golden Plains Shire Council, Victoria

The Shire's Council plan recognizes 35 separate communities, 22 of which have established formally constituted community planning groups, with members appointed from the local community. These groups are an integral part of council decision-making (McKinlay, et.al. 2011).

Each group presents to a Council meeting once every 12-18 months and Council staff prepare a six-monthly report to Council which collates generic issues from different community plans and summarizes community plans for consideration at the annual council retreat.

Initially, community plans allowed individual communities to identify relatively small local issues which were of immediate concern e.g. the positioning of a pedestrian crossing or parking outside the local school. Over time, the planning process has changed to become the basis of a community governance approach both at the local community level and at a Shire-wide level.

At the community level, the community plan feeds into the Council's own planning documents and community planning groups are an integral part of the Council's engagement arrangements.

The Council has recently made the decision to grant \$5,000 to each community planning group to be applied to implementing one or more of the objectives in its community plan. Many groups are using the funding to leverage additional funding from other funding sources.

Citizen committees

Citizen committees, comprised of volunteers, contribute significantly to the running of local authorities and are involved in local governance issues and managing community assets. Unlike most one-off community engagement exercises, citizen committees are ongoing and in some cases act to support long-term community governance.

Although often seen as rigid institutions, citizen committees have potential to enhance the democratic capacity of councils and the community, but this is not realized unless they are clearly integrated into and connected to broader activities of community governance.

Citizen committee refers to a diverse range of committees, all of which meet regularly, as volunteers or interest groups, serving a variety of remits. They come in many forms: council led delegated and advisory committees providing input to issues and policy and undertaking management of public facilities; not-for-profit incorporated committees of management working alongside councils managing facilities and services through contract and management agreements; and 'grassroots' committees such as 'Friends' groups, supported by councils because of the way they are seen to strengthen communities and support particular initiatives. Most officers and elected members in the majority of councils around Australia have ongoing contact with citizen committees.

To be effective, citizen committees should:

- Exist within the community engagement and governance framework
- Be representative
- Include participants who have the capacity to be effective
- Be visible and recognized by their council/community
- Understand how their contributions are feed into and affect council decision-making.

Example – Support available: Surf Coast Shire

The Shire, in Victoria's south-east comprises rapidly growing coastal areas outlying rural villages and settlements. The Shire has a well-educated and very engaged community, with a high level of volunteer activity and uses delegated committees in its operations, run through the Community Development, Planning and Tourism Departments (Bolitho, 2013).

A sample of recent work of special committees includes:

- Stribling Reserve Committee manages a reserve on the foreshore of a popular coastal resort. It negotiated in-kind and materials support from local businesses to significantly improve the quality of a 2012 upgrade to facilities
- Deans Marsh Committee manages a reserve with sporting oval and associated bookings and an annual festival
- Tourism Committee provides advice and input on the Shire's tourism strategy and ensures agreed strategic direction and equitable grants distribution
- Planning Committee comprises citizens with experience in related fields and meets monthly to hear submissions and make decisions on planning applications that have been objected to by the Shire.

Community Boards

Community Boards, sometimes called local boards, are a form of community governance established to support the work of a larger regional council. In New Zealand they are statutorily enabled sub-council governance. This model can enhance local representation and decision-making. The Community Board makes decisions that affect the local community whereas decisions that affect the region as a whole are made at the Regional Council level.

Example – Community Boards in Thames-Coromandel District Council, New Zealand

In 2012, the Council adopted a new community governance model as a key part of a strategy to empower communities and allow more local self-determination. In implementing this approach, the Council considered national and international approaches in devolved governance and created five Community Boards, each with four local residents (NSW Independent Local Government Review, 2012).

The Council delegate's authority and responsibility to the Community Boards to allow them to effectively govern and determine issues associated with their local areas. This includes decisions on budgets, leases associated with Council owned property in their jurisdiction, approval of all local activity levels of service and developing and approving local policies such as Reserve Management Plans.

Area based Council teams work from an area office with the community boards. Area managers have increased budgetary authority for expenditure and community development roles and coordinate with each other to ensure consistency across the five community boards.

This decentralized decision-making has delivered:

- Specified delegations for the management of local activities by the community boards, alongside the specification of district services that remain within council management.
- Community Board Plans (Thames Coromandel District Council, 2013) adopted by the community boards working with their communities. These are key tools in the Council's refocused planning and budgeting processes as they represent each community's priorities and reflect the distinctive character of each. The Plans fed into the 2013/14 Annual Plan process rather than being part of the public submission process.
- Active involvement of community boards in Council decisions on district services. Community boards may make formal recommendations to the Council and may be represented at every council meeting.
- Progressive implementation of changes to organizational, staffing and budget arrangements to align with community board governance and local management.

This community governance model is expected to result in greater cost effectiveness for the Council and its communities, build on existing community board structures and bring new possibilities for resourcing community services such as through funding sourced from within the community. The main outcome has been greater local decision-making and leadership.

Deliberative democracy – as part of on-going engagement processes

Example: Bronte Catchment Project, Waverley Council, Sydney (Department of Environment and Heritage, 2001)

Fifteen residents were selected to participate in a Citizens Jury to consider storm water management at Bronte Beach. A Planning Group (made up of representatives from the environment department and the Storm water Trust, cross-factional Councilors, Council Officers, community and precinct committee

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representatives, an observer from the local university and the project team) informed the preparation of detailed reports and papers for the Jury to consider, developed criteria to define the range of witness perspectives, and recommended questions for the Jury to address. The project had several distinct phases:

- Preliminary information gathering and 'getting to know the community'
- Community and Council engagement and development activities
- Community education campaigns with residents and small businesses
- A trial of deliberative democracy including a community survey and citizens jury
- Council organizational and community capacity building; and
- Development of on-going processes for enduring governance arrangements to integrate project outcomes.

As part of this overall process the Jury met for three days and considered specialist briefing material, heard and questioned expert witnesses, deliberated together and tested the evidence, and produced a series of recommendations which prioritized integrated solutions to storm water pollution, involving community, Council, businesses, visitors, and state government agencies.

Following the project:

- The Council established a new cross-departmental and Director-led Officers Storm water Working Party, to support continued coordination and planning of storm water management initiatives
- Some members of the Jury continued to serve on an ongoing Community Consultation Forum to review the implementation of environmental initiatives resulting from the project
- To encourage public participation in the environmental decision making process, Council established the Community Storm water Panel, a community reference group that oversees the implementation of storm water projects, to direct the expenditure of the environmental levy.

Participatory budgeting

In participatory budgeting communities prioritize capital spending for projects and sometimes also make decisions on the amount of funding allocated to the priorities. The inclusion of the community in the process of capital budgeting brings people into the realm of negotiation, compromise and prioritization. This type of budgeting ensures transparency and educates people about the scope of possibilities. As a result of public participation, people develop a better understanding of government and its programs and they learn about project sequencing and how decisions are made.

Example: Municipal participatory budgeting: Porte Alegre, Brazil

The City of Porto Alegre developed a process of public participation in the municipal budget to address severe disparities in the living standard of the city residents, by engaging residents using participatory processes. The annual participatory budget process starts with a number of neighborhood, district and regional assemblies, where residents from diverse economic and political

backgrounds and elected budget delegates identify spending priorities and vote on the priorities to implement (Sprague, 2000). The budget cycle starts in January and the process involves:

- First assemblies are held in March in each of the city's 16 districts and Municipal Council officials' present budget information. The participants elect regional delegates to attend year round-forums. Any community member can attend from any neighborhood.
- After the first assembly, each neighborhood (within the 16 districts) holds meetings to create a list of priorities for capital programs. City department staff also attends, depending on their area of expertise.
- At a second assembly, participants elect neighborhood representatives to the District Budget Forum to negotiate to create a district wide priority list.
- This assembly also elects two representatives to serve on the Municipal Budget Council. This Council determines how to distribute funds to each district according to the district priority lists so that more urgent proposals in a neighborhood within the district receive a higher priority.
- The resulting budget is binding although the Municipal Council can suggest but not require changes. It is transparent and the reasons for some projects receiving funding and others not are known.

Conclusion

If enhancing public value requires local authorities to be proactive in their approach to the creation of value as well as having citizens participate in its definition, the various approaches to community governance described above provide real opportunities. These approaches show the promise of changing the relationships between, and the actions of, both local authorities and citizens through innovative citizen involvement.

If public value is broadly understood as requiring officer and organizational expertise, the reshaping of the role of elected representatives and the allocation of finite resources (adapted from Williams and Shearer, 2011) participatory processes which strengthen each of these capabilities will be required. All these elements will be required to enable the realizing of public value in local government.

The values and aspirations of citizens are not just passively heard and responded to, as is the usual dynamic between citizens and elected representatives, in these innovative approaches to citizen engagement, government's role becomes one of educating and informing through participation, while citizens influence and meet the challenges (usually solely faced by elected representatives) of having to make decisions about resource allocations. The benefits to elected representatives are that they can be more confident that the community views influencing decision making are well informed and representative. Citizens can actually help make those challenging decisions about resource allocation and in the process develop more realistic expectations about the circumstances of governing that elected representatives find themselves facing.

Through innovative citizen participation both citizens and elected representatives are engaged in a discourse which reshapes the other. The processes enhance the functioning of representative democracy, by inserting the views of

citizens directly into decision making. While strengthening the capacity of elected representatives these processes simultaneously build trust, enhance transparency, strengthen legitimacy and invigorate citizenship by enabling informed inputs from citizens into decisions which impact their communities. These processes require a change in what local governments do from their roles as democratically elected bodies and as service providers to facilitators of citizen education in their own governance.

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